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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: KARZAI ADDRESSES PARLIAMENT

REF: KABUL 645

Classified By: Ambassador Karl Eikenberry, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: President Karzai addressed a joint session of Parliament on February 20, on the occasion of the opening of the final session of Parliament. Karzai spoke for 40 minutes to a poorly-attended, subdued joint session of Parliament that also included members of the Supreme Court and the Cabinet, prominent Mujahedin, and foreign officials. President Karzai placed emphasis on reconciliation, security, and Afghan sovereignty, mentioned only lightly subnational governance and development, and said little about corruption and the upcoming Parliamentary elections. Following Karzai's address, British Charge Sir Cowper-Coles and I met with acting Communications Minister Sangin in his office. END SUMMARY.

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Karzai's Speech Fails to Stir Passions  
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¶2. (U) In striking contrast to a similar joint session of Parliament I attended in 2005, the audience was completely subdued throughout Karzai's speech and the substantial absence of MPs at the joint session was noteworthy; about half the seats in Parliament were empty. The event seemed devoid of energy and almost perfunctory. Karzai gave deference to the Mujahedin by seating prominent jihadis in the front row. Included in this group was Haji Din Mohammed, General Dostum, Haji Mohammad Muhaqqaq, Presidential Chief of Staff Daudzai, Islamic Movement of Afghanistan head Ali Jawed, Fahim Khan, Karim Khalili, Independent Elections Commission (IEC) Chair Ludin, and Pir Gailani, mostly figures of Afghanistan's troubled past, as we try mightily to move forward with a reform agenda.

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Karzai - Reconciliation and Security are Job One  
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¶3. (U) Although he emphasized the need for reconciliation, Karzai at times took a hard stand against insurgents, saying that the Taliban and Hezb-E-Islami must realize that most of the blame for fighting rests on their shoulders. Karzai also reminded insurgents that they cannot rely indefinitely on foreign sanctuary (referring indirectly to Pakistan) and used a Pashto expression saying that a guest can only use a bed for half a night (meaning that the master can come at any time and throw the guest out). Displaying his lack of sensitivity to ISAF casualties and his customary emphasis on civilian casualties caused by NATO ISAF forces, rather than insurgents, Karzai produced a picture of an eight-year-old child, the only surviving member of his family. Karzai noted that the child had to claim the bodies of the 12 family members killed last week during fighting in Helmand, pointing out that, "This child is every Afghan". Karzai also told the group that Afghans wanted to hold a Peace Loya Jirga and that he intended to convene one prior to the Kabul Conference. He

also spoke of Saudi Arabia's role in reconciliation, remaining on message about his multi-pronged approach. His desire for the Saudis to act as a wedge between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda clearly manifested itself.

¶4. (U) Promoting Afghan sovereignty, Karzai announced that the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) should assume the lead for security operations in many areas of the country over the next two-three years and he planned for the ANSF to take the lead in all parts of the country within five years. He re-stated his desire for the ANSF to grow in size to 300,000 personnel over the next two years. Karzai said he supported conscription for the ANSF and would implement such a program once the security situation became more stable. Karzai made the point that he would neither allow Afghanistan to be used as a base to threaten regional neighbors, nor would he permit regional neighbors to threaten Afghanistan.

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Karzai - Elections a Success, Despite Foreign Interference  
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¶5. (U) Karzai termed the Presidential and Provincial Council elections a success, stating that the elections permitted Afghans to participate in a show of national spirit. He commented that Parliamentary elections will be held in the coming months (Parliamentary elections are scheduled for September 18, 2010) and that lessons learned from the August elections would allow the government to improve the upcoming elections. Karzai averred that "...certain circles defamed our (previous) elections" and then said he had changed the make-up of the electoral commission to prevent interference from foreigners in the future (Karzai issued a Presidential Decree nationalizing the selections process for members of the Election Complaints Commission on February 17 - Kabul 0645).

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Finish With a Flourish  
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¶6. (U) The only drama came at the conclusion of Karzai's speech when Upper House Speaker Mujaddedi was asked to give the closing prayer. Upon reaching the podium Mujaddedi launched into a spirited denunciation of governmental inaction on rampant corruption among government officials, claiming their inaction in prosecuting corruption shows Afghan government support of corruption. Mujaddedi then broadened his attack to include fellow mujahedin -- asserting that when the Taliban occupied 95 percent of Afghanistan, no one resisted the Taliban but himself. At this point, Lower House Speaker Qanooni (a Tajik and follower of former Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud) interrupted Mujaddedi saying, "We asked you to give the closing prayer, not to disrespect others!". Mujaddedi then announced that he would no longer serve in Parliament and asked the President to accept his resignation as of then. The final outcome of Mujaddedi's theatrics is not yet clear. The President accepted Mujaddedi's resignation the same day it was tendered. However, Parliament interlocutors advised us that on February 21 that a group of Upper House MPs went to Mujaddedi's house and begged him to return to his post. Mujaddedi initially demurred but allowed the throng to persuade him to return to Parliament. The MPs subsequently held a press conference where they asked President Karzai to reinstate Mujaddedi to his role as Upper House Speaker. The Palace has not reacted publicly to the latest turn of events.

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Acting Communications Minister Sangin - "What Went Wrong?"  
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¶7. (C) Following the conclusion of the event at Parliament, I was invited by acting Communications Minister Sangin for tea at his nearby house. I asked Sangin for his view of the difficult time Karzai is experiencing getting cabinet nominees confirmed. Sangin said he was stunned when he was not confirmed to retain his position as Communications

Minister. I asked what went wrong and he cited several reasons, the first of which is that Karzai made promises of appointments to far more MPs than could be accommodated. As a result, there was a backlash against those who Karzai did nominate. Sangin said that the Presidential election split Parliamentarians, leaving many bitter with his handling of the election and anxious to settle a score with him.

¶8. (C) Like many Cabinet Ministers who weren't confirmed, Sangin said another factor was his unwillingness to bribe MPs for their votes. He shared his experience with Parwan Province MPs who called him a few days prior to the Lower House's confirmation vote. He told me the MPs invited him to travel to Parwan to "discuss" their votes. Sangin said he chose not to travel, as it was a Friday, but sent his Chief of Staff to go instead. Upon arrival, his Chief of Staff saw Minister of Defense Wardak leaving, and later Minister of Interior Atmar arriving, both there "to do business" with the Parwan MPs; often referred to as the Shomali Mafia. The MPs advised that projects in their province needed financial support, support that would be "remembered" by the MPs. Sangin told his Chief of Staff to inform the MPs that he would not be able to provide the requested support (Sangin told me about 40 MPs approached him with similar requests). Sangin also noted that the Palace did no lobbying on behalf of Karzai's Cabinet nominees, leaving individual nominees to fend for themselves. Finally, he said that Hezb-E-Islami, angry that they did not garner more cabinet nominations from Karzai, responded by voting against all except Minister of Education Wardak, a party loyalist.

¶9. (C) When I asked Sangin why Karzai's handling of the second tranche of Cabinet nominees seemed to have been a haphazard affair, Sangin said Karzai assembled the list hastily and with little vetting of the names. Karzai, he told me, didn't want to go to the London Conference with barely a quarter of his Cabinet confirmed, adding to his haste. Additionally, Parliament had already extended their session to vote on Cabinet choices and were pressuring him to complete his Cabinet. Sangin made the surprising admission that Karzai only met face-to-face with several of his second-round nominees after they were confirmed.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: Most useful in Karzai's speech was his emphasis on strengthening sovereignty, crucial to our own success in Afghanistan. His reference to the Taliban as the primary source of his nation's suffering and to their days of insurgency as numbered was also welcomed as an indication our strategies are better aligned. On the other hand, his absence of detail in addressing government accountability and performance remain troubling. Similarly, he offers little in public that indicates a serious commitment to strengthening sustainable democratic institutions. Lastly, the place of honor at this Parliamentary session in 2010 accorded to the same Mujahedin leaders whose criminal activities and misdeeds in good part led to the rise of the Taliban in the mid-1990's; they remind us of the challenges we face in pushing forward with reform and reconciliation.

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